

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

26 MARCH 2013

Present: Councillor K Collett (Chair)
Councillor A Khan (Vice-Chair)
Councillors N Bell, S Greenslade, K Hastrick, M Hofman,
P Jeffree and S Rackett

Also present: Councillor Stephen Johnson and Councillor Malcolm
Meerabux

Officers: Partnerships and Performance Section Head
Committee and Scrutiny Officer

54 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE/COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

There was a change of membership for this meeting: Councillor Jeffree replaced Councillor Aron.

No apologies for absence were received from Councillor Martins.

55 DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS (IF ANY)

There were no disclosures of interest at this point of the meeting.

56 MINUTES

The minutes of the meetings held on 21 November and 20 December 2012 were submitted and signed.

57 MINUTES FROM SCRUTINY PANELS/TASK GROUPS

The Scrutiny Committee was asked to note the minutes of the following Scrutiny Panels and Task Groups which had been published since Overview and Scrutiny Committee's last meeting –

- Budget Panel – 27 November 2012, 16 January 2013 and 11 March 2013
- Outsourced Services Scrutiny Panel – 26 November 2012 and 5 February 2013
- Community Safety Partnership Task Group – 31 January 2013

RESOLVED –

that the minutes of the various Scrutiny Panels and the Task Group be noted.

58 **CALL-IN**

No Executive decisions had been called in.

59 **OUTSTANDING ACTIONS AND QUESTIONS**

The Scrutiny Committee received an update incorporating the outstanding actions and questions raised at previous meetings. Responses were included within the document.

Members considered the responses to each of the outstanding actions and questions.

PI 27 – Future projections for the number of households living in temporary accommodation

The Scrutiny Committee noted the response provided by the Housing Section Head, which was attached as Appendix 1. Councillor Rackett suggested a further update later in the year, particularly in light of the changes to Housing Benefits. The Scrutiny Committee agreed to a further update in six months time.

Housing Benefits

Councillor Khan informed the Scrutiny Panel that the Shared Services Joint Committee was going to be disbanded. Benefits would be the responsibility of Three Rivers District Council. He questioned how Watford Councillors would scrutinise the service.

The Committee and Scrutiny Officer responded that it might be treated as an outsourced service and if that were the case then it would be monitored by the Outsourced Services Scrutiny Panel. She added that she needed to discuss this matter further with senior officers.

The Partnerships and Performance Section Head commented that the performance information would still need to be provided and it would just depend which scrutiny committee or panel needed to receive the report. She added that the same would apply to those services provided by Watford Borough Council on behalf of Three Rivers, for example Human Resources.

AHR 1 – Affordable Housing threshold

The Scrutiny Committee noted the response provided by Planning Policy. Members agreed that they wished to review the original recommendation in six months time.

HP 7 – Number of penalty notices issued in Watford General Hospital

The Scrutiny Committee was provided with the information sought from the Associate Director. The document included the number of penalty notices issued in the Trust's three hospitals; the number of notices paid and the number cancelled.

Councillor Khan noted the recent issues regarding the hospital's car park, particularly the introduction of charges for Blue Badge holders. He felt that this could have re-energised the previous Task Group.

The Chair, Councillor Collett, said that the Associate Director was due to be providing an update about the car parking arrangements for the June meeting. She stated that she was very concerned about the current parking situation at the hospital. Having visited the hospital recently, the Chair said that she felt very few of the Task Group's recommendations had been taken on board, which did not correspond with the Associate Director's comments in November.

Councillor Khan noted the number of notices issued at Watford Hospital's car park compared to the other two sites. He felt this showed that Watford was very busy.

RESOLVED –

1. that the outstanding actions and questions' update be noted.
2. that the additional updates be added to the work programme.

60

UPDATE ON THE COUNCIL'S KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS AND MEASURES - THIRD QUARTER (OCTOBER - DECEMBER) 2012/13

The Scrutiny Committee received a report of the Partnerships and Performance Section Head setting out the Key Performance Indicators and the third quarter performance measures for 2012/13. The Partnerships and Performance Section Head highlighted some of the key aspects of the report.

HR1 – Sickness absence

Councillor Bell noted the comment regarding the increase in short term sickness and asked whether this was occurring in particular departments, for example Benefits.

The Partnerships and Performance Section Head responded that musculoskeletal problems and surgery were some of the main causes for absence. For those officers working outside at this time of year colds were a common cause. Norovirus had been recorded as a reason for sickness during the third quarter.

CS13 – Number of households living in temporary accommodation

Councillor Bell noted the increase in the number of households in temporary accommodation and asked for an explanation. He was also aware that households should not be placed in bed and breakfast accommodation for longer than one month.

The Partnerships and Performance Section Head explained that the Council ensured that households were not placed in bed and breakfast accommodation for longer than six weeks, the statutory period. This could, however, have an impact on the number of households in temporary accommodation. The availability of permanent accommodation and new build had an impact.

Benefits' Performance

Following a question from Councillor Bell, the Partnerships and Performance Section Head advised that the service's performance was on an upward trajectory. She would contact the Head of Revenues and Benefits for the latest information.

Councillor Khan added that the Shared Services Joint Committee had been provided with figures which showed the number of days taken to process claims was going down. He informed Members that the transference of information on to the Atlas system had skewed some of the data. A possible solution was for the service to purchase a piece of software.

The Committee and Scrutiny Officer advised that she would email the link to the Shared Services Joint Committee's information on the Council's website.

CS17 – Number of private sector units secured for use

The Chair asked for further information on the work the Council was doing with private sector landlords. The Partnerships and Performance Section Head advised that she would obtain details and circulate it to the Scrutiny Committee.

Councillor Hastrick felt that one concern private landlords might have was that in the future Housing benefits would be paid directly to the tenant and not the landlord.

The Chair thanked the Partnerships and Performance Section Head for her report and said that she had noted some good results in this quarter.

The Partnerships and Performance Section Head advised that she would provide the final quarter update at the next meeting. It could also be reported where the performance data for the services to be transferred to Three Rivers would be presented.

RESOLVED –

1. that the Scrutiny Committee's comments on the performance of the council's key performance indicators for 2012/13 at the end of quarter 3 be noted.
2. that the Scrutiny Committee's comments on the additional performance measures at the end of quarter 3 be noted.
3. that the requested information be circulated to the Scrutiny Committee.

61

EXECUTIVE DECISION PROGRESS REPORT

The Scrutiny Committee received the latest edition of the Executive Decision Progress Report as at 15 March 2013. The Committee and Scrutiny Officer informed Members that as part of the new Executive Arrangements it was necessary to record all officers executive decisions. Due to the number of Traffic Regulation Order decisions and other highways matters these had not been included in the document. They were recorded on the Council's website and were available for public scrutiny.

The Scrutiny Committee noted the officer's comments, but asked that Ward Councillors were informed of any Traffic Regulation Orders or highways works within their wards.

RESOLVED –

that the latest update be noted.

62

TASK GROUP UPDATE

The Scrutiny Committee received a report of the Committee and Scrutiny Support Officer providing an update on the Management of Disabled Parking Bays Task Group.

The Chair, who was also a member of the Task Group advised that the meeting on the 25 March had been cancelled. 104 replies had been received in response to the survey and officers needed time to analyse the information. A meeting had been proposed for May. A report would be presented to Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its June meeting.

RESOLVED –

that the update be noted.

WORK PROGRAMME AND NEW SCRUTINY SUGGESTIONS

The Scrutiny Committee received a report of the Committee and Scrutiny Officer including the latest edition of the Work Programme and two scrutiny suggestions for consideration.

Work Programme

The Committee and Scrutiny Officer informed the Scrutiny Committee that she had updated the Work Programme to include all the reports that had been presented throughout the year and those items on which Members had requested updates in the future. She stated that Members would see that some meetings did not currently contain many items and advised that if Members wished to add something to a future meeting they could inform her and she would arrange for a report to be included.

Scrutiny suggestion – Watford Community Housing Trust

The Chair invited Councillor Khan to explain why he had proposed the review into the Watford Community Housing Trust.

Councillor Khan advised that his casework for Housing Trust related matters had increased. He understood that the Trust was currently undergoing a restructure. He questioned the quality of service and value for money provided by the Trust.

The Chair thanked the Councillor for a good suggestion and excellent scope.

At this point Councillor Hastrick declared an interest in the matter as she was on the Housing Trust's Board. She took no part in the discussion about the establishment of a Task Group.

Councillor Bell stated that he had attended the Housing Policy Advisory Group the previous evening. Several suggestions had arisen at that meeting which could be incorporated into the review, for example lettable standards.

The Committee and Scrutiny Officer advised that she would contact the Housing Strategy Officer for further information.

The Committee and Scrutiny Officer referred Members to her report and the list of Councillors who had expressed an interest in taking part in the review.

Members agreed to the list of Councillors and stated that the Task Group should complete its work by June 2013. A report should then be presented to Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its June meeting.

Scrutiny suggestion – Property Services

The Chair invited Councillor Rackett to explain why he had proposed the review into the Council's Property section.

Councillor Rackett said that Councillors had wanted to carry out a review of the service for some time but had continually been told that the service was too busy to take part. He acknowledged the Head of Legal and Property Services' comments attached to the report. He said that due to the huge number of assets held by the Council it was important to review the service. It could be added to the scrutiny programme to take place after the Housing Trust review had been completed. He suggested it could begin in the Summer or Autumn.

Councillor Johnson agreed with the scrutiny proposal. He said that he had been asking for a review for a couple of years. He added that it was important that Councillors knew what was happening. The Council was a property rich borough.

Councillor Khan agreed with the previous Councillors. He suggested that the Task Group should be given a time limit, for example it could begin in September for a set number of meetings.

The Committee and Scrutiny Officer informed the Scrutiny Committee that Budget Panel had received an update at its last meeting. She would circulate the report and minutes to the Scrutiny Committee and those who had expressed an interest in taking part in the review. The report highlighted the work of the Property Service and the latest information on the Council's property portfolio.

Councillor Khan proposed that a Task Group be established, commencing in September to review the Property Service. The Head of Legal and Property Services to be notified and advised that if the date were not suitable she should provide another date.

The Committee and Scrutiny Officer reminded the Scrutiny Committee that the Property Team would be transferring from the Head of Legal and Property Services' department to the Head of Planning's department. She was unsure of the exact date as it was dependant on the outcome of a report being considered by Cabinet at its meeting on 3 April 2013.

RESOLVED –

1. that the rolling work programme be noted
2. that a Task Group be established to review the Watford Community Housing Trust comprising the following Members –
 - Councillor Asif Khan
 - Councillor Jackie Connal
 - Councillor Stephen Johnson
 - Councillor Anne Joynes
 - Councillor Karen Collett
3. that the Task Group reports back to Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its June meeting.

4. that a Task Group be established to review the Council's property assets comprising the following Members –
 - Councillor Steve Rackett
 - Councillor Asif Khan
 - Councillor Stephen Johnson
 - Councillor Kareen Hastrick
 - Councillor Malcolm Meerabux
5. that the Head of Legal and Property Services be informed that the Property Services Task Group is to commence in September; if the date is not suitable another date to be provided.

64

ANNUAL SCRUTINY REPORT 2012/13

The Scrutiny Committee received an extract of the Annual Scrutiny Report 2011/12, which related to Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Members were asked if there was any additional information they wanted included in the report. The Committee and Scrutiny Officer advised that once a draft had been completed for this year's annual report it would be circulated to the Scrutiny Committee for comments.

It was suggested that more detail could be included on the feedback received from the Executive, officers and external organisations regarding the Task Groups' recommendations.

The Committee and Scrutiny Officer advised that the annual report contained a separate section about Task Groups and more details could be added.

RESOLVED –

that further details about the feedback on Task Groups' recommendations be incorporated into the final report.

65

DATES OF NEXT MEETINGS

- Monday 22 April 2013 (For call-in only)
- Thursday 27 June 2013
- Thursday 4 July 2013 (For call-in only)

Chair

The Meeting started at 7.00 pm
and finished at 8.10 pm